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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

*Logistic Developments In The Laos Panhandle Since The Initiation
Of Operation Lam Son 719*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
March 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Logistic Developments In The Laos
Panhandle Since The Initiation
Of Operation Lam Son 719

Introduction

This memorandum is the second in a series analyzing logistical developments in the Laos Panhandle since the initiation of Operation Lam Son 719. Our first memorandum reviewed the situation through 21 February.* This analysis focuses on events since that date but refers, when necessary for better perspective and understanding of logistic operations, to events reported previously.

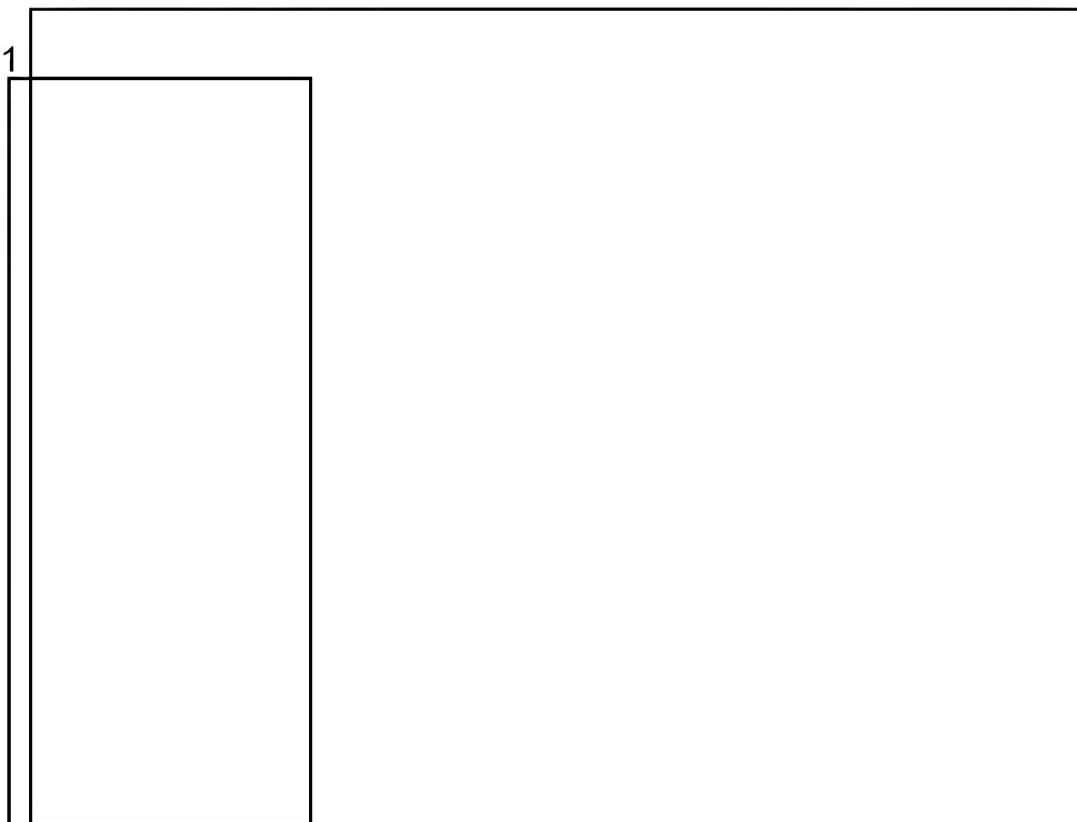
Areas of Disruption

1. Operation Lam Son 719 has clearly caused the Communists numerous logistical difficulties in roughly a 450-square-mile area bounded by Route 926 on the south, the Se Bang Hieng river on the north, the Laos/South Vietnam border on the east, and a line some seven miles to the east of Tchepone. Route 92, one of the north-south arteries of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, was interdicted along several segments early in Lam Son 719 and

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Economic Research and coordinated within the Directorate of Intelligence.

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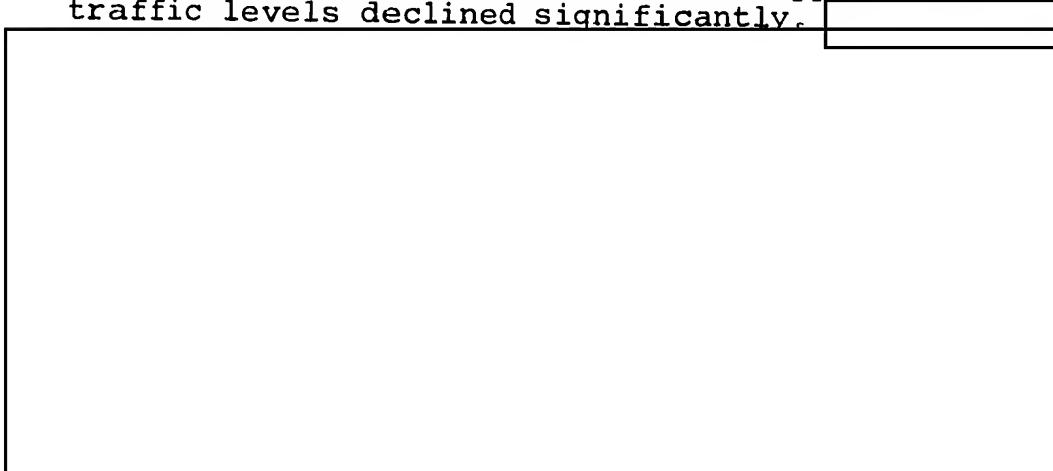
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3. During the period 25 February to 1 March an onslaught of unseasonable torrential rains made many of the roads so wet and slippery that traffic levels declined significantly.

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4. Despite these problems the overall disruptive effects seem to be relatively short lived and localized. As will be discussed below, traffic levels by 3 March had returned close to the high levels noted during the February crash offensive. The enemy seems to be maintaining a heavy southward flow of supplies.

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The Pattern of TrafficInput Roads

25X1 5. [redacted] high levels of traffic on the major input corridors since the start of the "crash" program on 7 February to 24 February when torrential rains hit the Panhandle, temporarily hindering logistic activity. Throughout this period, all three input corridors showed high levels of activity, Ban Karai Pass reflecting the heaviest traffic. Further north at Mu Gia Pass, [redacted] increased after 14 February, reversing the decline apparent there in previous weeks.

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25X1 6. [redacted] corroborate [redacted] 25X1 [redacted] on input traffic. Heavy traffic flows on the entry corridors,* which were under way when Lam Son 719 began, continued through the end of February [redacted]. To counter recent concentrated bombing of several target areas in the Ban Karai Pass, the enemy has nearly completed

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a new road bypassing the heavily bombed area. According to pilots, all roads in the western DMZ corridor (excluding Route 1032B) sustained heavy truck traffic through the end of February. In this area, pilots also reported that Route 9110 has been receiving increasing truck traffic. This connector route links the cross-border access routes (Routes 1039, 1038, 1035, and 92A) with the north-south route structure, and its increased use probably reflects the rerouting of traffic from the interdicted Route 1032B. After disruptions early in February, the enemy apparently has again begun using the Se Bang Hieng river for the movement of supplies. [redacted] drums floating down the river and others caught in retrieval areas near Route 913 north of Tchepone.

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Tchepone/Muong Nong Areas

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8. The Communists have been moving large volumes of supplies through the Tchepone area by making use of the multiple route structure west and south of the town. Although the size of the flow cannot be measured with precision [redacted]

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[redacted] indicate that the traffic moving through the [redacted] area probably has been at record levels.

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[redacted] Heavy rains and water-logged roads in late February, however, hampered the effort.

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10. [redacted] indicate surging traffic flows in the Tchepone area since 8 February. In the first two weeks of Lam Son 719, [redacted] the heavily canopied Routes 917 and 914 west and south of Tchepone rose to a level roughly double that noted in the two weeks prior to the operation. Although [redacted] dropped sharply after 24 February, coincident with torrential rains and the ending of the "crash phase" of the General Offensive, they continued to reflect a fairly high level of traffic on Route 914, the main road through the Tchepone area, [redacted]

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[redacted] show traffic to be rebounding to the high levels of the February crash programs. Aerial observers also reported heavy use of roads in the area throughout February. Both Route 911 and parallel north/south routes to the west supported heavy truck use between the entry corridors and the staging areas near Tchepone and Muong Nong. [redacted] both Routes 917 and 914 showed increased use and that their numerous spurs carried very heavy traffic after 8 February.

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11. Pilots report that Route 23 west of Tchepone continued to show consistently moderate use but no dramatic change, indicating that the enemy has not been forced to redirect most of his traffic to a more secure system because of Lam Son 719. [redacted] that traffic on Route 23 was moderate from north of Tchepone down to the Se Bang Hieng crossing until Operation Desert Rat began on 16 February. Since then, both Route 23 and Route 9 have reflected only light to very light traffic.

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South of Tchepone

12. Recently, much of the Communist effort has been shifting to the region well south of Tchepone.

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13. This pattern of supply activity is in keeping with the enemy's normal dry season supply movement: "crash" efforts progress southward along with peak levels of cargo shipments. The beginning of an accelerated supply program south of Muong Nong is consistent with the evidence that large quantities of cargo have been moved through the Tchepone area during the past few weeks. [redacted]

[redacted] that formerly abandoned Route 234/2341, which parallels much of Route 914, had been made serviceable and was supporting moderate traffic. Its use provides a western bypass around the crucial Route 914/92 junction and has helped the Communists to move supplies into the Muong Nong area.

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14. From the start of Lam Son 719 until the end of the "crash phase," [redacted] reflected heavy traffic on Routes 99 and 92 -- the main roads south to Ban Bac. There was an apparent trebling [redacted] on Route 99 coupled with a decline [redacted] on Route 92. [redacted] also indicate that Route 99 leading from Muong Nong south to Ban Bac was in "moderate to heavy" use throughout February, except for the last several days of the month when it was in "light to moderate" use. [redacted]

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[redacted] reporting

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confirms that traffic is moving out of the Tchepone area to areas south of Lam Son 719 operations.

15. [redacted] indicated that Ban Bac, [redacted] remains a hub of logistic activity and that the Route 92/96 corridor leading through the complex continued to show "moderate to heavy" use.

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[REDACTED] on Route 96 just south of Chavane continued to reflect moderate traffic levels throughout February; although they did dip sharply on 24 February they recovered on 25 February to normal levels.

16. Exit routes leading off the Route 92/96 corridor also exhibited little change in traffic use according to pilots: Route 922 showed heavy traffic until 25 February and light-to-moderate traffic thereafter. Exit Route 165/966 extending east from Chavane reflected light to moderate vehicle activity to within several miles of the South Vietnamese border, and pilot reports of 2 March indicate the road to be in "good" condition. Farther south, exit Route 110 showed varying levels of vehicle activity on both its eastern and western ends [REDACTED] On 19 February, pilots saw 16 trucks on the western end of the route near the Cambodian border -- the peak sighting this dry season on this route and an indication of the probable increasing throughput of supplies into Cambodia. We have received little reporting since that date on the status of Route 110, particularly where it enters into South Vietnam. The western end of Route 110 leading into Cambodia was reported as carrying "heavy" truck traffic on 26 February.

Enemy Supply Losses

17. Through 4 March, about 951 tons of enemy supplies had been captured or destroyed, as tabulated below:

	<u>Short Tons</u>
Class I (food)	381
Class II and IV (weapons and equipment) a/	61
Class III (POL)	373
Class V (ammunition)	136
<i>Total</i>	951

a. Including 19 tons of weapons and 42 tons of miscellaneous equipment and supplies. In addition, 226 vehicles have been seized or destroyed (153 trucks and 73 tanks).

18. The rate of supply captures in Laos was highest during the first week of operations when 441 tons of supplies were seized -- 46% of total losses to date. POL supplies comprised the bulk of losses reported in the first week of operations. Some 325 tons were seized -- 87% of such losses to date. Since the first week of the operation, food and ammunition losses have risen substantially, but the overall rate of supply losses has diminished. Losses averaged 63 tons daily during the first week, 50 tons daily in the second week, and only 16 tons daily during the last 10 days. The total tonnage of ammunition and weapons losses through 4 March equated to 1,800 individual weapons, 400 crew-served weapons, and some 200,000 rounds of ammunition.

Irregular Forces

19. Irregular forces targeted against the logistic system in the Laos Panhandle are attempting to further complicate the movement of supplies

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If successful and sustained, this operation would help to deny the Communists unimpeded use of the western route structures, cutting off the sole alternative to the traditional route structure through the Tchepone/Lam Son 719 area. If the Communists should apply significant force against these guerrilla units, they would, of course, have to withdraw. In response to the operation to date, the Communists have redeployed at least one battalion to the Muong Phine area.

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Overall, however, contact between irregular and Communist forces has been light and sporadic. Irregulars have reported cratering Route 23 south of Muong Phine. Pilot reports of only very light enemy use of Route 23 in this area indicate the road is probably blocked.

Cambodia

20. Communist logistic activities in northern Cambodia have increased significantly since December 1970. Since that time the enemy has constructed or upgraded nearly 100 miles of roads and motorable trails along the Route 97/Tonle Kong and Route 13 corridors between Laos and Stung Treng. Most of

this construction occurred between early January and early February. The Communists now have a direct and unimpeded access corridor between Laos and the key Cambodian supply points of Siem Pang and Stung Treng, significantly improving their overall capability to move supplies into the region. New bypasses, storage areas, and transshipment points further enhance the enemy's logistic capabilities in the area.

21. Enemy supply flows into Cambodia have probably increased as the more viable logistic system has evolved. [redacted]

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[redacted] revealed increased enemy use of various roads in northern Cambodia and confirms a direct, actively used route between Laos and Stung Treng via Routes 97, 136(113), and 13 and various secondary roads. [redacted]

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"heavy" traffic on Route 97 in January and the development of new, active storage areas and transshipment points along the road. Pilots attacking Route 97 during the past month have reported increased instances of secondary explosions and fires, indicating probable growing ordnance stockpiles; [redacted]

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secondary explosions continued at 15-second intervals for about 30 minutes after an attack on Route 97 about 10 miles north of Siem Pang in late January. In sum, the evidence available [redacted]

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[redacted] strongly suggests that over the past month or so the amount of supplies being moved from Laos into Cambodia has been substantially greater than that indicated by [redacted]

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[redacted] along western Route 110 in the southern Panhandle or riverwatch teams along the Se Kong.

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Conclusions

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22. [redacted] indicate that the Communists have been able to move large amounts of supplies into and throughout the Laos Panhandle despite Operation Lam Son 719, [redacted]

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[redacted] provide an impressive catalogue of an accelerated and high rate of supply movement from North Vietnam through the three entry corridors [redacted]

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[redacted] southeast of Tchepone and south of the operational area of Lam Son 719. The continuous pattern of heavy truck traffic extends to the Ban Bac area, 90 miles south of Tchepone. Further south, there is considerable evidence that increasing -- but still unquantifiable -- amounts of supplies have been moving out of Laos into Cambodia over the past month or so.

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24. Although generally successful, the Communist supply effort has not been without problems. Route 92 north and south of Route 9 was interdicted early in the operation; over 950 tons of supplies have been lost to ARVN forces; and bombing of vital lines of communication continues to cause problems. Torrential rains beginning on 24 February and ending two days later left roads waterlogged and many water crossings temporarily blocked, which impeded traffic flows. The sharp drop [redacted] after 24 February probably reflected both problems associated with the poor weather and the fluctuation in activity as one transportation phase ends prior to the beginning of the next. By 2 March, [redacted] had again surged upward.

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25. The Communists currently face a dual task: at the same time that they are expediting supply flows through Laos for their forces in Cambodia

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and South Vietnam they must resupply augmented security forces countering ARVN forces in the Tchepone area. They appear to be meeting this challenge. Maintenance of high supply flows reflects the fact that Lam Son 719 has not pushed far enough into Laos to cut the most important arteries that carry supplies from North Vietnam to South Vietnam and Cambodia. Even if the forces reach Tchepone, the main arteries will remain intact because the Communists' logistical movements currently are following a northwest-southeast axis (Routes 917 to 914, 234/2341 to 99 and 96) that at its nearest point is about five miles south of Tchepone and Route 9. By following these routes, Communist logistical commands have been able to transport supplies through the area occupied or threatened by Lam Son 719 without serious disruption.

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